Tool: Brainstorming and Multivoting

WHAT IT IS

A technique for generating a large number of ideas, and then narrowing down the list to the significant few that are of most interest to the group.

WHEN TO USE IT

In the visioning, designing, planning, or implementing phases to tap the group's creativity in order to generate a list of possibilities and then come up with a few win-win solutions.

HOW TO USE IT

1. State the purpose or topic of the brainstorming session, and select one person to serve as facilitator and one person to write the ideas that are generated.

2. Generate a list of brainstorming guidelines to be used during the brainstorming session. These will be enforced by the facilitator. These guidelines should reflect the concept that during brainstorming, any idea is valid. No judgments or decisions are made while generating the list.

EXAMPLES OF BRAINSTORMING GUIDELINES

- Do not praise or criticize ideas.
- Record ideas on chart paper so they can be seen by the entire group and preserved after the brainstorming session is over.
- Do not number ideas.
- The recorder should encourage group members to reduce each idea to a few key words.
- A large group may want to use two recorders to keep ideas flowing quickly.
- Be imaginative; play off ideas that are already listed.
- Combine duplicate or similar ideas—with the concurrence of the suggesters as well as the rest of the group.

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3. Everyone in the group (including the recorder) takes a turn, in sequence, providing a thought or idea on the topic. The facilitator does not participate in giving ideas, but ensures that everyone follows the process and respects the established brainstorming guidelines. This process continues until several people "pass" their turn. Then, participants offer ideas as they occur.

4. Ideas are combined to eliminate duplication and clarified to ensure that everyone understands them.

Once the group has generated its list of ideas, it can use multivoting to narrow it down.

1. Each person votes for as many items as desired but only once per item. Eliminate items receiving fewer than a minimum number of votes that the group has agreed upon.

2. Narrow down the list further by having each person vote for half the remaining items. Eliminate items with fewer than a new minimum number of votes.

3. The process ends when the group has agreed on an acceptable number of items.